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Edgar and Me

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I was excited when Edgar Allan Poe's ghost began haunting my house. I mean, c'mon! Edgar Allan Poe, right? The greatest American writer ever! And I'm a writer, right? So after the initial shock of meeting his ghost – the same shock I'd have meeting any ghost – I was pretty excited. But that soon waned because, well... he's unpleasant to be around.

First of all, he smelled. And I don't mean the, '*smell of the grave*.' I've smelled dead things. This was body odor. Which is ironic when you consider that ghosts don't have bodies anymore. I hate to put modern values on someone from the nineteenth century but, jeez, he stank! The dog thought so, too. When Tobin met Poe he took a good long sniff and then had two huge sneezes. Then he trotted off into another room and never came near Poe again. I might have forgiven the smell, though. I mean, Edgar Allan Poe again, right? But he's a whiney, lying, egotistical jerk; he cheats at cards, and always has to one-better you.

Take his whininess: "Oh my father was mean to me, Oh my sweet Violet died," oh this, and oh that and on and on. The first few times he showed up I just listened to him. Again, it *was* Edgar Allan Poe. But it was non-stop. And he was arrogant, too! For example, one evening we were sitting on the porch and he's complaining about how stingy some editor had been in paying him.

"Yeah, they're all cheap bastards," I said. "I have the same problems"

Poe looked at me with a shocked expression for a moment. "Surly you do not compare legitimate editorial monetary prudence with the shabby and parsimonious treatment given *mah* work," he said.

I didn't say anything right then (although I was tempted) but went to bed shortly after.

Another time we were discussing literature we thought was well written. We mostly kept the subject on works we would both be familiar with, and he was very knowledgeable. But at one point I mentioned I had always liked *The Red Badge of Courage*. Poe asked me the story and I explained it as well as I could in two minutes.

"Yes," Poe said severely. "Ah know the story. It was stolen from me by this... this Crane, person."

I looked at him in shock. "You lying son of a bitch," I said. "The Civil War didn't even start until 1861. And the author wasn't born until long after that. There's no way you could have written it. I looked it up. You died in 1847, you lying bastard!"

Poe's eyes darted quickly aside then back. He pulled his lips into a tight straight line pushed his chin forward and ejected, "Suh, you wrong me!"

With all the dignity his rat-like countenance could exude he continued, "Ah

obviously am mistaken. As you know, Ah served in the army and was a cadet at West Point. Ah have written stories about warfare that were never published. This story is obvious similar to one Ah have written!"

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"Hmm. You were kicked out of West Point," I commented.

"Ah resigned, suh!" he declared.

At first Poe only showed up occasionally. Then, he began showing up two or three times a week. Finally he was in my house almost every day. One day I walked into the living room to find him asleep on the couch. Twice he came into the bathroom while I was bathing. Locked doors meant nothing to him. Once I discovered him surreptitiously going through my papers. Then there was the time he showed up drunk and vomited in my fish tank. Fortunately ectoplasmic barf isn't any more corporeal than ghosts, so by the time I got back from the kitchen with cleaning utensils, it was already gone.

Over time my relationship with him changed from hero worship and adoration to polite host to annoyed cohabitant. It reached the point where he would say something to me and I would ignore it, or if I couldn't ignore it, respond in as few syllables as possible. Finally the absence of intercourse was perceivable even to his self-absorbed eminence and he asked me about it. I let him have it with both barrels. I told him he was a selfish, whinny creep, who I didn't trust as far as I could throw, and that he was a pain in the ass. He got one of his proud, defensive, offended looks, but I cut him off before he could drawl his first vowel.

"I want you out!" I screamed. "Get out! You didn't live anywhere near here when you were alive! Why are you here now? Get out! I don't want you here – leave!"

I stopped and glared at him, and after a moment, watched his lower lip drew inward and his eyes lower towards the tip of his nose. He began to open his mouth.

"Ahm..."

"Please leave," I said quietly.

Poe started, ever so slightly, held his facial expression and slowly shut his eyes. Then he began to disappear. But instead of the quick popping in and out that he had done in the past this was a slow fade that lingered. After several seconds, when he was just starting to fade for good, he opened his eyes again. His eyes looked moist and I suddenly felt a slight twang of pity for him. Very slight, however.

It's been a few months now, and I haven't seen him since. I finally have my privacy back. The odor has disappeared and the dog is willing to come into the living room again. I don't know why Edgar Allan Poe wanted to see me. That research I did said that he died in Baltimore, which is long way from here. I think that he was just lonely. But I really hope he doesn't come back.